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State of the Nations

Four Stars at President's Elbow

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Washington
As President Kennedy pondered weeks ago the Cuban landings for which exiles were clamoring, and as he has pondered lately the looming showdown on Berlin, he may well have wished for thoroughly competent military advice right at his elbow.

This suggests why he called in Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, former United States Army Chief of Staff, to serve at the White House with the title of Military Representative of the President.

In his book "The Ultimate Decision: The President as Commander in Chief," Professor Ernest R. May writes: "When President Truman relieved Gen. Douglas MacArthur in Korea and later when President Eisenhower admitted having authorized U-2 observation flights over the Soviet Union, Americans of quite different political faiths wondered anxiously if the commander in chief had not become too great, too complex, and too terrible a job for any one man."

In his conclusion Mr. May, associate professor of history at Harvard, points out that a President has a wider view of national interest than any mere military commander could have. He concludes that the issue is "not only whether one man can stand the double strain of the presidency and the commander in chief but also whether the nation can stand to have any man except one, the President and the commander in chief, determine what its fate shall be."

President Kennedy did not bring much in the way of strategic military experience to the White House, as did General Eisenhower. Consequently, as with President Truman and his use of Admiral William D. Leahy, there is an arguable need for having an active, wide-ranging military

man within quick-summons range of the President's desk. In his first White House months, Mr. Kennedy sought this counsel from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and from Secretary of Defense Robert J. McNamara. But Secretary McNamara, fresh out of Ford, could give civilian advice mainly. And the advice of the Joint Chiefs proved faulty and insufficiently perceptive on Cuba.

Now General Taylor, a restless idea man and a courageous-in-combat veteran who was the first United

States commander at Berlin (1949-51), is to keep watch on military planning for the big crises and keep track of operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Actually, however, the President believes he is making more effective his contacts with the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency. Not all would agree to this. What he is using is an entirely different approach, here, as in other departments of government, from that employed by President Eisenhower.



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States commander at Berlin (1949-51), is to keep watch on military planning for the big crises and keep track of operations of the Central Intelligence Agency.

This appointment has understandably produced mixed emotions at the Pentagon. General Taylor's four-star rank, his brilliance in espousing his own ideas, and his closeness to President Kennedy threaten to downgrade the Joint Chiefs in their role of top military advisers to the President.

Moreover, General Taylor has favored unorthodox ideas: for instance replacing the corporate-body Joint Chiefs with a single chief of

President Eisenhower preferred an orderly chain of command and the use of accustomed and approved channels of information. President Kennedy seems to prefer specially selected task forces, and a scattered proliferation of advice and advisers. Time magazine critically calls the Taylor appointment "one more voice added to the clamoring chorus of advisers who fight for John Kennedy's ear."

Every President has his own system for gathering ideas and using trusted men. What counts in each case is whether "the system" works. In the Cuba fiasco, the system manifestly did not work; the advice was one-sided and insufficient. Now the President faces Berlin; and he has added an articulate, vigorous voice on the military side which he believes will serve to increase the range of choices and the precision of intelligence arrayed before him when the great moments of decision arrive.

In the last analysis, the safety of the nation will depend in a degree on how effectively the President, who must also by the Constitution be the commander in chief, uses his own preferred system.